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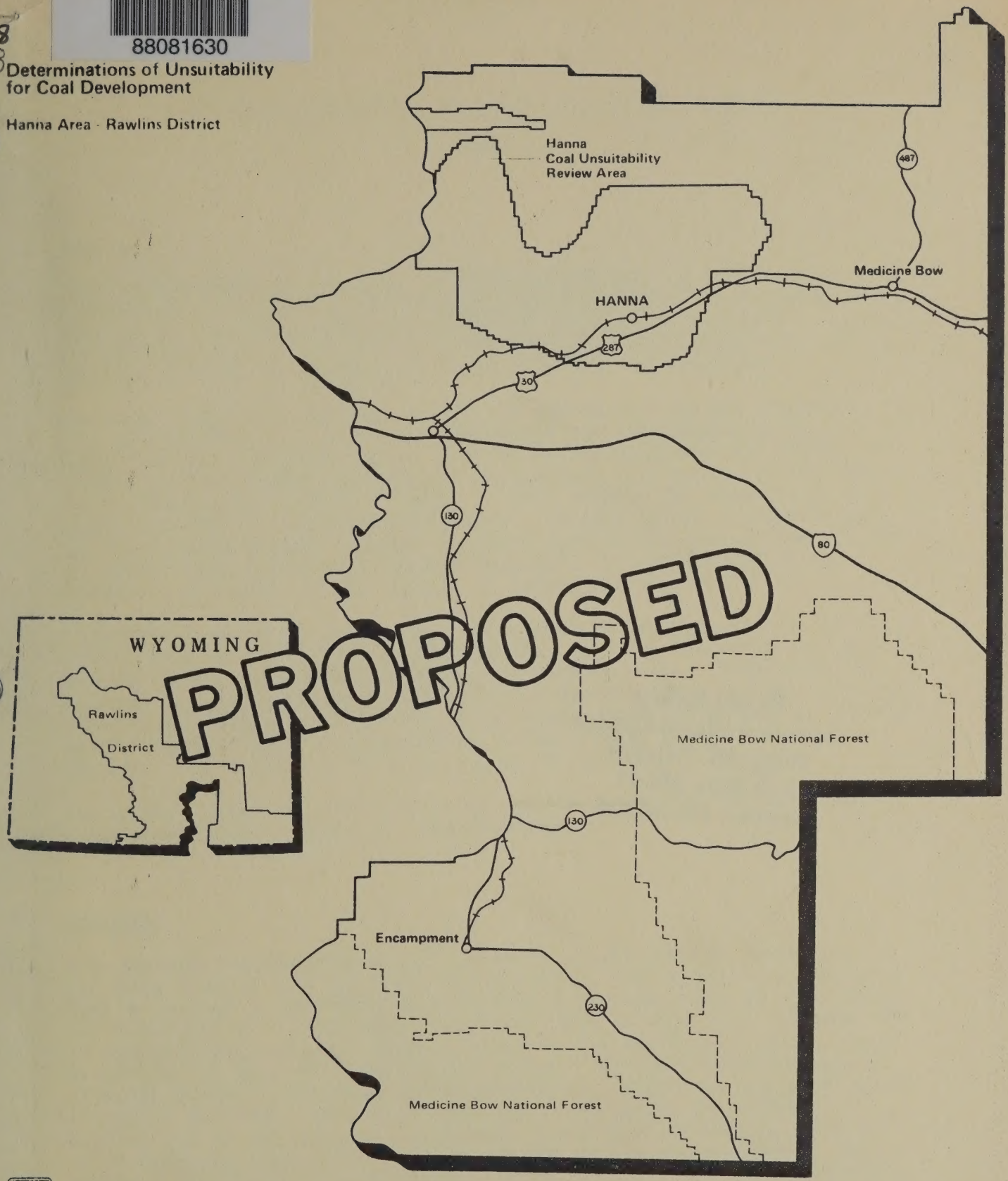
Determinations of Unsuitability for Coal Development

Hanna Area - Rawlins District



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PROPOSED REVISIONS TO THE HANNA MFP LAND USE DECISIONS

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

This planning supplement proposes revisions to the multiple use decisions specifically defining coal development in the Hanna Basin. The original planning decision under which the coal program is currently managed is part of the 1977 Management Framework Plan (MFP) for the Hanna Planning Unit. Map 1, Appendix B, shows the original MFP decisions for the planning unit.

Revisions to MFP coal decisions reflect new information and are consistent with recent statutory requirements that affect coal development on federal lands. In addition to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of October 21, 1976, which requires land use planning, the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) of August 3, 1977, commits the Secretary of the Interior to specific planning requirements. Section 522(b) of SMCRA directs the Secretary to conduct a review of federal land to determine whether classes of federal lands should be designated unsuitable for surface coal mining operations or adverse surface effects of underground coal mining.

A principal part of the process for implementing the requirements of the federal land review mandated by SMCRA involves applying 24 interim coal unsuitability criteria to known recoverable coal resource areas. These criteria, developed by the Secretary, address resource considerations such as wilderness areas, scenic areas, natural and historic values, wildlife species and habitat, water resources, flood plains, alluvial valley floors, prime farmlands, and the like. See Appendix A for a listing of the unsuitability criteria.

The proposed revisions reflect both the application of the coal unsuitability criteria and other multiple use considerations.

Overview

This planning supplement pertains only to the 60,000 acres of public land in the Hanna Basin area of the Hanna Planning Unit. Coal unsuitability criteria will be applied to the remaining known recoverable coal resource areas within the planning unit no later than fiscal year 1986, at which time the Hanna MFP is scheduled for revision. However, this revision could occur sooner, should priorities for land use or development change. The Hanna Basin has been selected because of its close association with existing coal mining operations throughout the area. Five major companies are producing approximately 12 million tons of coal annually for markets in the East and Midwest. The coal is of relatively high quality with a high BTU and low sulfur content. Environmental impacts would be minimal due to the location of existing facilities (i.e., railroads, power, access), the checkerboard land pattern, and the type of wildlife habitat. Operating companies need 5 to 10 years lead time to extend their operations into new areas. A review of this area will also provide opportunities to extend existing operations should the Secretary decide to proceed with coal leasing.

No specific sites (tracts) for coal development have been, or will be, identified in this planning supplement. Identification and delineation of tracts would occur only after a Secretarial decision to proceed with new coal leasing.

Area Description

The Hanna Basin is located in northcentral Carbon County. The area extends from a line about 7 miles north of Interstate 80 on the south to the Medicine Bow River on the north, the Seminoe Reservoir on the west and 10 miles east of Hanna. The land pattern is checkerboarded with alternate sections of private and federal lands. Topography varies from rolling hills to flat dry lake beds broken by moderate to steep draws. Sandstone bluffs are scattered throughout. Major features include the million acre-foot Seminoe Reservoir to the west and the Medicine Bow River to the north.

Vegetation is predominantly a grass-sagebrush type with scattered pockets of greasewood and saltbush. Total recoverable coal reserves in areas of interest exceed 350 million tons of high BTU, low sulfur coal.

The economy of the towns of Hanna, Elk Mountain, Saratoga, Medicine Bow, and Rawlins are heavily dependent upon the production of coal in the Hanna Basin.

Original Coal Planning Decisions for Hanna Basin

The original multiple use decisions for coal development in the Hanna Basin are as follows:

1. Allow continued development of coal now under lease.

   Rationale: Contractual obligations.

2. Subject to findings of environmental assessment, develop a schedule for development of the following leased tracts: Hanna South, Medicine Bow, and Seminoe I and II.

   Rationale: Continue existing operations, supply existing and expanding markets, meet national needs without opening virgin areas, produce low sulfur coal and prevent bypass situations on checkerboard lands.

3. Do not lease tracts along the shoreline of Seminoe Reservoir and Medicine Bow River.

   Rationale: Prevent adverse effects on visual and water quality of these premium water resources. Riparian habitats are critical to wildlife (i.e., raptors, fish, big game).

Revision Summary

Application of unsuitability criteria and multiple use considerations in arriving at the proposed decisions listed in this planning supplement has effected little change from the original 1977 decision. For protection of the

Seminoe Reservoir and the Medicine Bow River, a 2,000-foot buffer zone has been maintained through an unacceptable and unsuitable designation. Seven areas of ¼ mile radius are identified as unsuitable because of raptor nesting sites.

Definition of Area Classifications

The proposed multiple use decisions included in this planning supplement appear in the Updated Plan section. The decisions are based on designations defined as follows:

1. Unsuitable areas for coal development based on unsuitability criteria. Unsuitable areas are governed by one or more of the unsuitability criteria and are not amenable to criteria exceptions. An example would be an area that contains active bald and golden eagle nests (criterion 11) and where disturbance during the breeding season cannot be controlled or nests cannot be moved (exceptions to criterion 11).

2. Unacceptable areas based on multiple use considerations. Unacceptable areas are exempted from coal development due to multiple-use resource considerations other than those defined in the unsuitability criteria.

3. Acceptable area for coal development. Acceptable areas are broken down as follows:

    a. Acceptable--defined as areas acceptable for further consideration for coal development, which were not excluded by application of unsuitablity criteria and multiple use considerations.

    b. Acceptable pending futher study--defined as areas where known values exist but their relationship to the unsuitability criteria or multiple use considerations cannot be defined without further specific information.

    c. Acceptable pending further inventory--defined as an area where inventory data relative to the unsuitability criteria or multiple use considerations is lacking.

Public Coordination

A public meeting will be scheduled in mid-March to receive oral and written statements. Comments received will be considered in developing final decisions for the MFP supplement which will be available in May 1979. Anyone desiring more specific information prior to the public meeting, can review the unsuitability criteria, criteria exceptions, and the associated findings at the Bureau of Land Management District Office, 1300 Third Street, Rawlins, Wyoming.

UPDATED HANNA PLAN

The proposed revisions to the original multiple use decisions for coal development are listed below with rationale for the proposal. When final decisions are made, identified acceptable areas may be considered for future coal development.

Proposed Multiple Use Decision

1. Areas identified on Map 3 as acceptable are available for future consideration for coal development. These areas would be subject to the following if it is determined by the Secretary that new coal leasing is necessary.

   a. Tract delineation, ranking, and selection.

   b. Findings of an environmental assessment.

   c. Further study in buffer zones around areas identified as unsuitable.

   d. Inventory for endangered species and other wildlife considerations (i.e., raptors, sage grouse nesting and winter areas).

   e. Demonstration that reclamation is possible to a degree necessary to restore disturbed areas to a productive state for wildlife and for livestock.

   f. Disturbance of areas only to the degree necessary for further coal development.

   g. An effective air and water pollution abatement program that would assure compliance with applicable state and federal quality standards.

   Rationale

   The area lies within a known recoverable coal resource area (KRCRA) and contains workable, economically recoverable coal deposits. The coal is generally of high quality due to a low sulfur content (0.2%-1.1%) and a favorable BTU rating (8,500-11,500).

   The area lies within a checkerboard land and coal ownership pattern where every other section is privately owned. Failure to develop federal coal in the near future could result in bypass situations. Availability of federal coal would greatly enhance economic recovery (private and federal) and facilitate logical mining plans.

   Development of federal coal would provide for extension of existing mining operations. Such coal development would extend mining life, supply existing contracts and markets, and make efficient use of in-place overhead (i.e., railroads, powerlines, equipment, and the like).

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Development of federal coal would provide for extension of existing mining operations. Such coal development would extend mining life, supply existing contracts and markets, and make efficient use of in-place overhead (i.e., railroads, powerlines, equipment, and the like).

Coal could be produced from this existing mining area with a minimum of pre-production requirements to immediately supply national energy needs.

Coal could be produced from the acceptable areas in such a manner that the majority of adverse impacts could be mitigated.

2. Do not allow coal development in those areas identified on Map 3 as unsuitable by criteria. Portions of the areas identified as unsuitable could become acceptable if underground mining were the main method proposed for coal extraction.

Rationale

The following areas were found unsuitable after application of the unsuitability criteria and exceptions. See Appendix A for a listing of unsuitable criteria.

a. Area immediately adjacent to the east shoreline of Seminoe Reservoir, Medicine Bow River, and Austin Creek (unsuitability criterion 11).

b. Area adjoining Medicine Bow River and Austin Creek (unsuitability criteria 17 and 23).

c. Seven raptor (hawk, falcon, and eagle) nests scattered throughout the Hanna Basin area (unsuitability criterion 11).

d. An area containing historic sites generally located in T. 23 N., R. 84 W., Section 34, N½N½; T. 23 N., R. 84 W., Section 35, N½NW¼; and T. 23 N., R. 84 W., Section 26, W½W½E½ (unsuitability criterion 7).

3. Do not allow coal development in those areas identified on Map 3 as unacceptable because of multiple use conflicts.

Rationale

Areas adjacent to Seminoe Reservoir. Seminoe Reservoir is a premium water resource, intensely used for water-related recreation. Strip mining within a buffer zone of 2,000 feet from the lake shore would result in permanent visual intrusions to the rugged and scenic shore lands. The bluffs along the reservoir are also prime habitat for bald and golden eagles and other raptors. Mining within the prescribed buffer strip would produce sheet and wind erosion affecting both air and water quality. Sedimentation of the reservoir would impact the fisheries, the quality of water sports, and the life of the dam.

Areas adjacent to Medicine Bow River. The river flows into Seminoe Reservoir within the subject areas. Mining within a 2,000 foot buffer zone would destroy riparian zones, eagle and other raptor habitat, cause sedimentation, and destroy scenic values.

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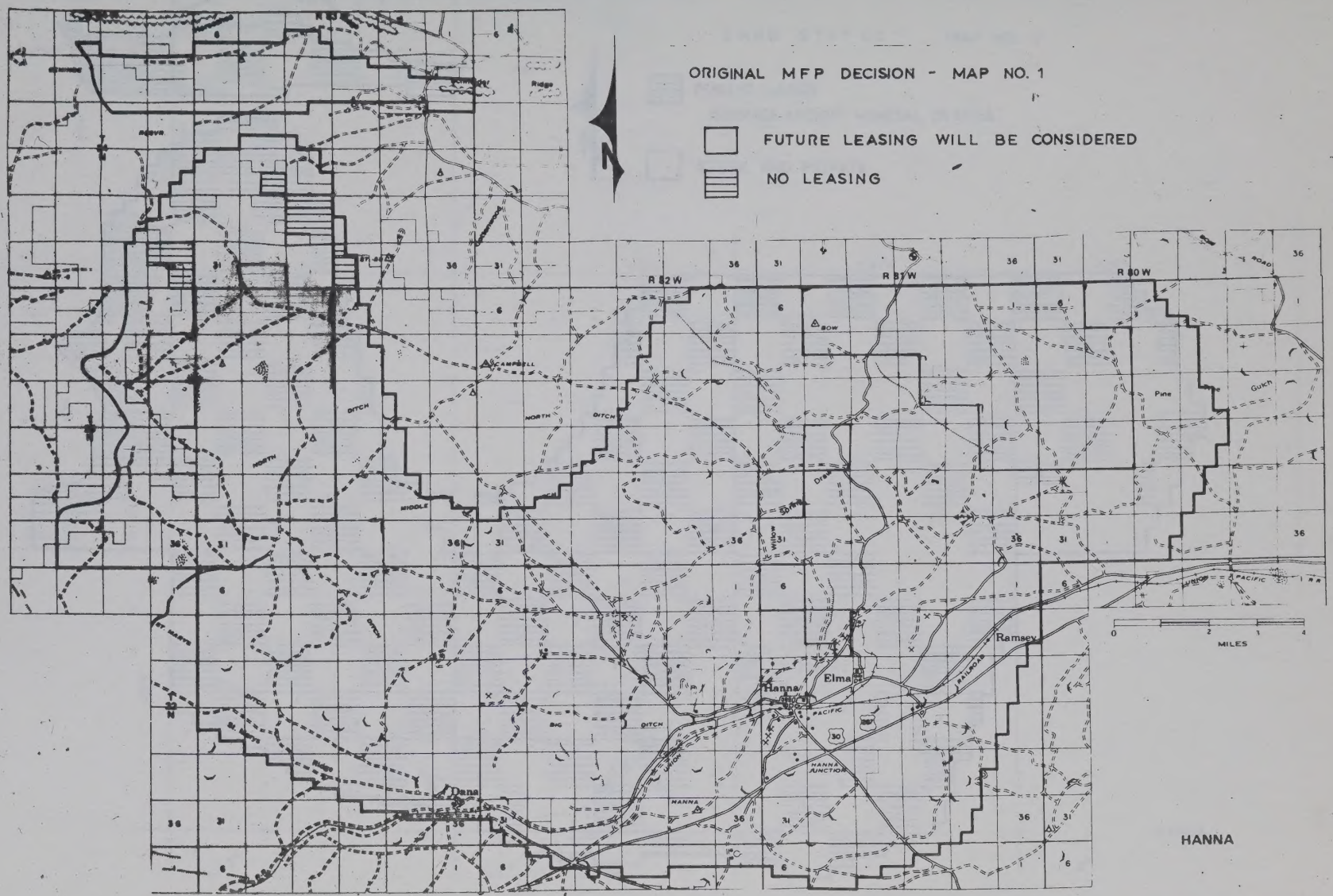
APPENDIX A

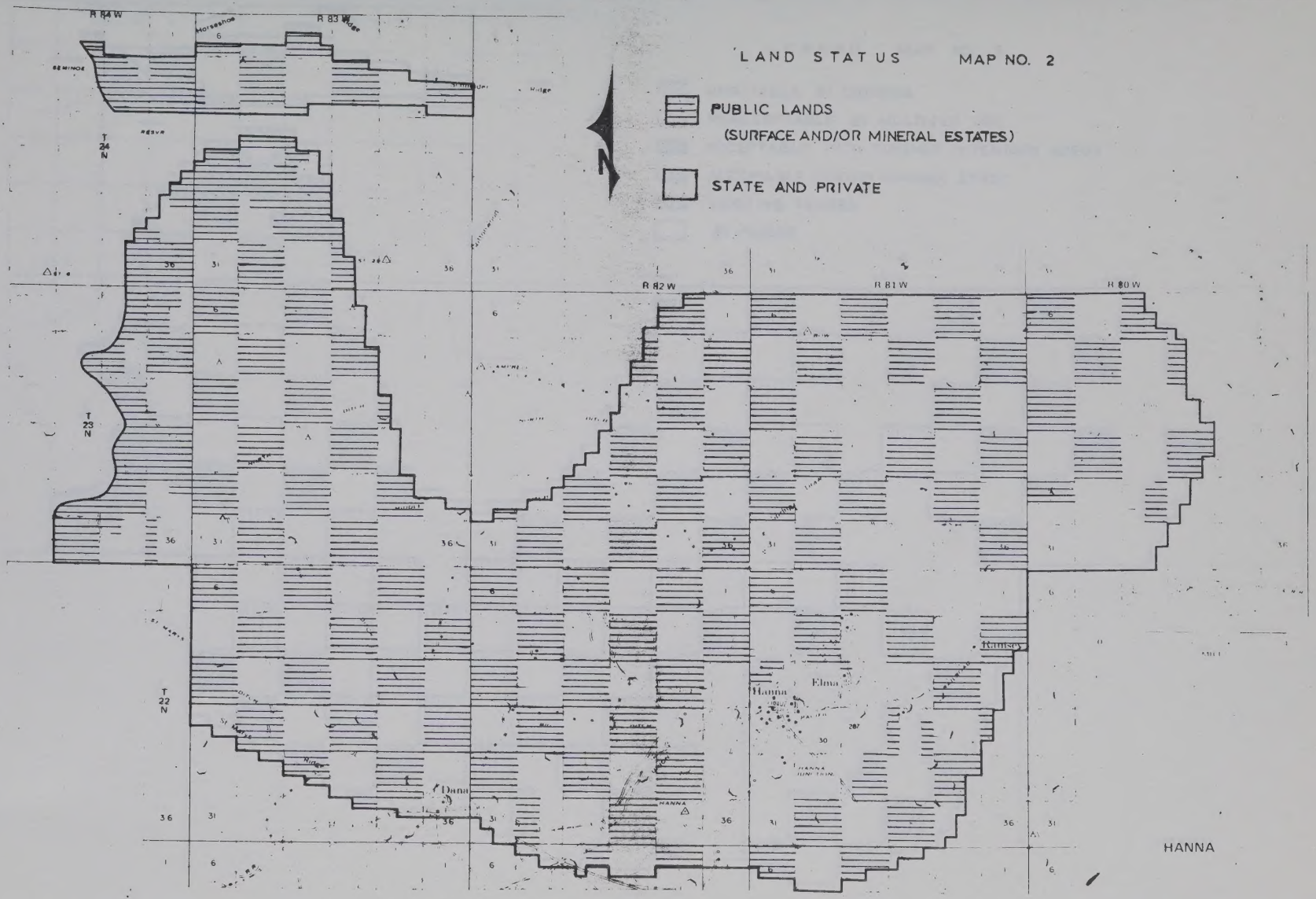
Unsuitability Criteria

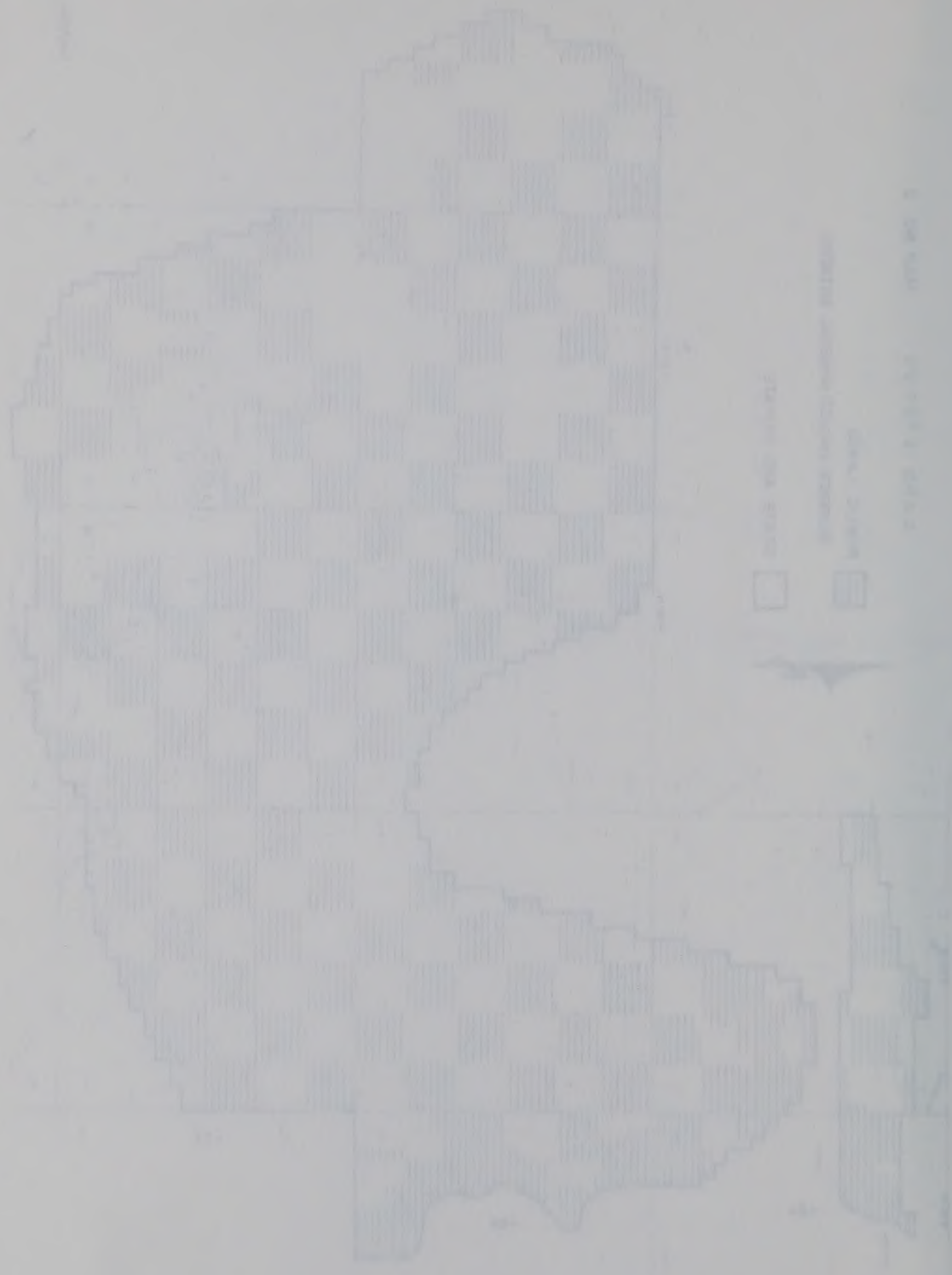
1. Federal land systems, i.e., National Park System, National Wildlife Refuge System, National System of Trails, and the like.
2. Rights-of-way and easements.
3. Buffer zones along rights-of-way and adjacent to communities and buildings.
4. Wilderness study areas.
5. Scenic areas.
6. Lands used for scientific studies.
7. Historic lands and sites.
8. Natural areas.
9. Federally listed threatened and endangered species.
10. State listed endangered species.
11. Bald and golden eagle nests.
12. Bald and golden eagle roost and concentration areas.
13. Falcon cliff nesting sites.
14. High interest migratory birds.
15. High interest State resident fish and wildlife.
16. Wetlands.
17. Floodplains.
18. Municipal watersheds.
19. National resource waters.
20. State lands unsuitable (not available at this time).
21. State proposed criteria (not available at this time).
22. Prime farmlands.
23. Alluvial valley floors.
24. Unreclaimability.

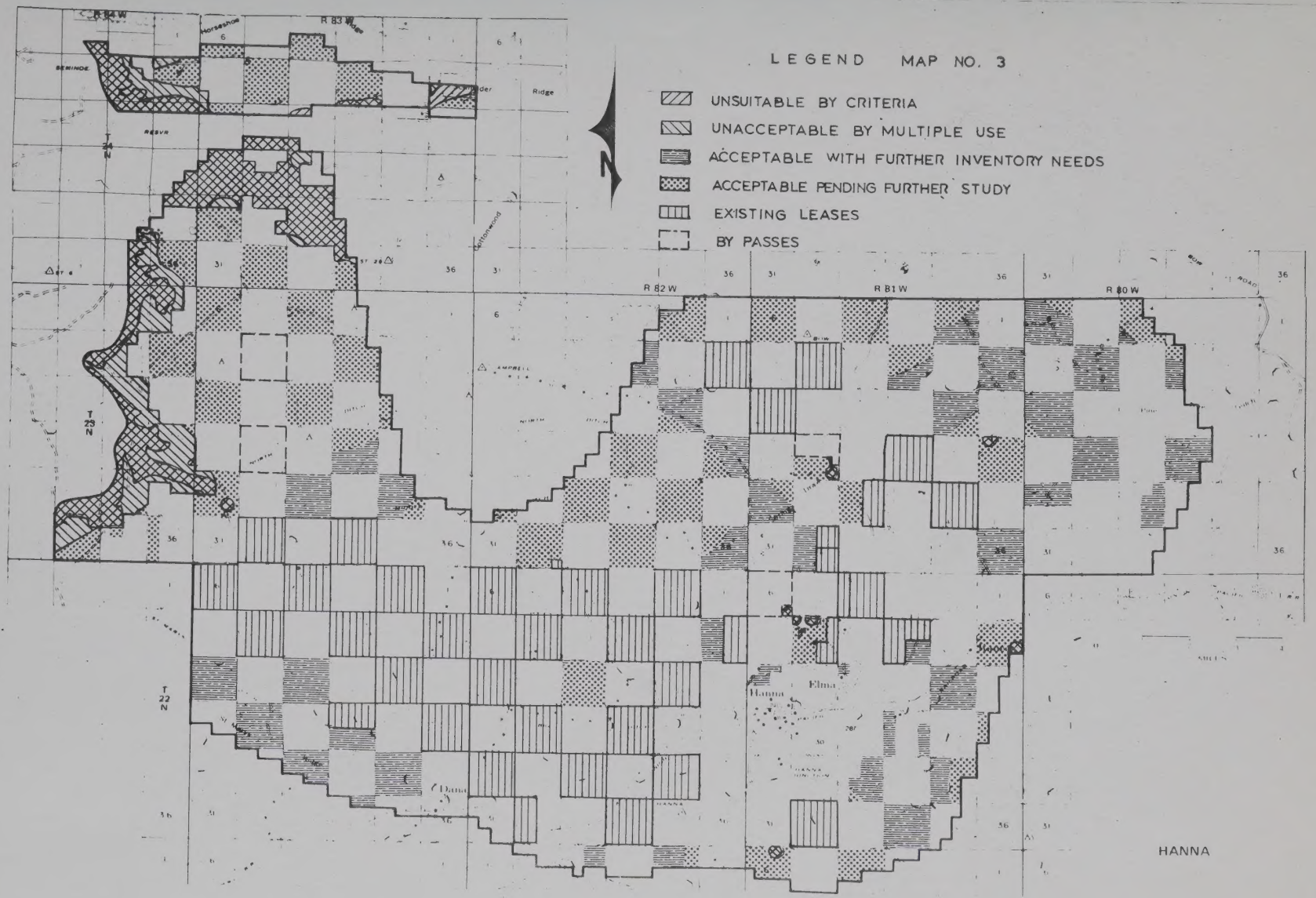
APPENDIX B

MAPS


ORIGINAL MFP DECISION - MAP NO. 1
FUTURE LEASING WILL BE CONSIDERED
NO LEASING
R 82 W
R 81 W
R 80 W
Dana
Hanna
Elma
Ramsey
Pine Gulch
MILES
HANNA


LAND STATUS
MAP NO. 2
PUBLIC LANDS
(SURFACE AND/OR MINERAL ESTATES)
STATE AND PRIVATE
R 84 W
R 83 W
R 82 W
R 81 W
R 80 W
T 24 N
T 23 N
T 22 N
Horseshoe
Hanna
Elma
Ramsey
Dana
HANNA




LEGEND MAP NO. 3
UNSUITABLE BY CRITERIA
UNACCEPTABLE BY MULTIPLE USE
ACCEPTABLE WITH FURTHER INVENTORY NEEDS
ACCEPTABLE PENDING FURTHER STUDY
EXISTING LEASES
BY PASSES
R 84 W
R 83 W
R 82 W
R 81 W
R 80 W
T 24 N
T 23 N
T 22 N
Hanna
Elma
Dana
HANNA

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